Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE — Radio Service — OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Thursday, December 16, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CHRISTMAS BATH TOWELS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

"When in doubt, give bath towels." My practical friend was discussing last minute Christmas gifts.

I said, "Surely not for the men and boys of the family?"

"Why not?" she answered. "They use plenty of 'em, don't they? And they have very definite ideas on the kind of bath towels they like. Thick and wide, long and tough enough to pull back and forth across their backs after a shower. Why not give a man two or three good sturdy towels marked with his own initials, or made with a special colored border?"

It sounded like a good idea to me, after all. And of course most of the housewives who are planning to stock up at January white sales would be likely to appreciate an advance supply.

My friend said that her own preference for general family use, was a medium-sized towel, 20 by 40 inches. "All of them shrink when they're laundered," she added. "So I don't like to get them too small. I suppose you've seen that bulletin by the Bureau of Home Economics on buying sheets, blankets, and bath towels? There's a lot in it about sizes and qualities of towels, and what to look for when you pick them on the counter. Here, I'll lend you my copy."

So I've brought it to the studio today, in case some of you want to follow her suggestion about Christmas bath towels. Probably before the January white sales you'll want to send for a copy of your own. The number of this publication is Farmers' Bulletin 1765, and the title is "Guides for Buying Sheets, Blankets, and Bath Towels." The title doesn't mention pillow cases and wash cloths, but they're in it, too.

On the subject of what size bath towel to buy, the Bureau of Home Economics says that large ones do not necessarily take up the most moisture. The amount of looped surface, as well as the length and width measurements, determine how much water a towel will absorb. Large towels may have wide borders of plain fabric that reduce the drying surface. Or the soft absorbent loops may go all the way to the hem.

To check this point the Bureau bought 60 pairs of turkish towels. They ranged in price from 14 cents to a dollar and a half. Among those examined were two measuring alike, 23 by 46 inches. One of these contained approximately 1,050 square inches of looped surface,- the other only 800 square inches. Almost one-fourth of the length of the second towel was taken up by borders. In other words, its looped portion was about 11 inches shorter than that of the first towel. And the main use of these borders seems to be for drying behind the ears!

Buying very large heavy towels, the Bureau says, is not always economical, in spite of the masculine love of them. This is particularly true when there are small children in the family. Small light-weight towels are easier for the youngsters to manage. If the design and quality are the same, a large towel always costs more than a medium-sized one. The lighter towels are easier to handle on wash-day. If the laundry done outside the home is paid for by the pound, lighter weight towels keep down the laundry bills.

Now about towels offered as "specials" or "bargains." They are sometimes irregular in size. They may be cut short or woven narrow. But in reality the price per square yard of towel is often just as much or more than that of regular-sized merchandise. Also these bargain towels may be seconds,- imperfect in some respect. But not all sale towels are defective. Sometimes a merchant is able to buy at reduced cost and pass the savings on to his customers.

In practically every bath towel, there is a compromise between the properties that enable it to take up water and those that make for long usefulness (much pulling across backs!).

Soft fluffy towels take up water best. They have little twist in the yarns, and the foundation fabric is loosely woven. But some twist in the yarns is necessary to give strength, and a firm foundation cloth is essential to hold the pile yarns, or loops, in place. So some sacrifice in drying capacity is usually necessary to get a towel with a foundation cloth that is strong and firm enough to give good wear.

Turkish towels are almost always made from cotton because it is soft, absorbent, and easily laundered. They are woven on a special loom with a terry-motion attachment. This forms the loops on both sides of the cloth. The better quality towels are generally made with two-ply yarns in the ground warp, where they increase the durability of the cloth.

In addition to a firm foundation weave, look at the selvage and hems on a bath towel. In good selvages every filling yarn wraps around the last warp yarn. Hems on most towels are from three-eighths to an inch wide, and should be back-stitched at the corners or stitched down the ends of the hem, to keep them from raveling.

Before buying colored towels or towels with colored borders, inquire about their color-fastness to washing. Firmly woven borders and bands are less likely to shrink and pucker the end of the towel than those which have a different tension from the foundation cloth.

There isn't time to tell you more about good construction in a bath towel, so I hope you will send for the bulletin and read it all for yourself. Remember, Farmers' Bulletin 1765, "Guides for Buying Sheets, Blankets, and Bath Towels."

****